United Nations S/2000/610

Security Council

Distr.: General
21 June 2000

Original: English

Letter dated 21 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to forward a press release, entitled "Ethiopian army demolishes the towns of Tesseney and Guluj", issued on 21 June 2000 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea (see annex I). I also enclose AFP's independent corroboration of Ethiopian wanton ransacking and looting of Tesseney, Guluj and their environs (see annex II).

Such abominable acts of officially sanctioned destruction and looting of public and private property cannot and should not go unpunished. We expect the international community to at least openly condemn these criminal acts, which by the way have been carried out in all the other areas under Ethiopian occupation as well. At best, punitive measures need to be taken against the regime in Ethiopia. Such savage acts of state-sponsored vandalism and looting, occurring at a time when an agreement for the cessation of hostilities and commitment to a peaceful solution has been signed, can only cast a shadow on the hopes for building peace. Such crimes not only further sour state-to-state relations but also poison people-to-people relations by evoking hate and vows for vengeance, thus endangering any future reconciliation and lasting peace.

I should be grateful if you could have this letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Haile **Menkerios**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex I to the letter dated 21 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Ethiopian army demolishes the towns of Tesseney and Guluj

Press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Asmara, 21 June 2000

In a nefarious act of state vandalism, the Ethiopian army has burned virtually all public, commercial and private premises and looted property in Tesseney and Guluj before evacuating from these places on Monday, 19 June 2000.

In Tesseney, the power plant, the Bank, private shops, the school, cereal warehouses, the Shell and Total petrol stations and several residential houses were gutted with fire. Organized looting teams brought from Ethiopia for the purpose loaded on trucks took away movable property from shops and commercial premises, not sparing even small items, such as kitchen utensils from private homes. The extent of damage incurred in Guluj was not fully known at press time although there were reports of the wanton burning of several residential quarters.

Ethiopia reoccupied Tesseney last week "to demonstrate" that it was not forced out of the town but "evacuated it due to political instructions from the Government". It is now clear that this political instruction had no aim other than "finishing the job" of destroying the city as was the case with Barentu. As will be recalled, the Ethiopian army had demolished the new cotton processing plant in nearby Ali-Gidir during its first occupation of Tesseney but the city was largely spared from destruction, apparently because the army had no time to complete its intended aims of senseless vandalism.

Ethiopia's acts of wanton destruction in Tesseney and Guluj have occurred in the aftermath of the signature by both sides of the Organization of African Unity agreement on the cessation of hostilities.

Annex II to the letter dated 21 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Ethiopian troops clean out, then clear out of Eritrean town

AFP press release, Tesseney, Eritrea, 21 June 2000

Ethiopian soldiers and civilians methodically cleaned out this thriving border town, looting en masse before ending their second occupation of Eritrea's gateway to Sudan. In what now resembles a ghost town, all public buildings, shops and homes were ransacked and set on fire, while the hospital was emptied of all medicines, furniture, beds and sheets. "We can never forgive them," said shopkeeper Mahamat as he stood before the empty shelves of his store on the town's main square. Piles of debris sat in front of other businesses, whose doors were bashed in, like those of the schools, banks, petrol stations, and child day-care centres. Smoke drifted from an agricultural cooperative whose stocks of sorghum had been set ablaze, and cow carcasses lay rotting in dusty alleyways after serving as meals for the Ethiopian troops.

Civilians were also trucked in to take part in the pillaging, according to rare Eritrean witnesses who remained in the town during its second occupation from 14-19 June. "They brought in dozens of trucks filled with civilians, even women," said Hussein, an old man who sought refuge in Tesseney's mosque during that time. "They loaded everything they could and drove off towards the south and the Ethiopian border," he added, pointing to stacked chairs and mattresses left behind in front of a day-care centre. But two witnesses said no fighting had taken place in the town, which the troops evacuated at dawn on Monday, a day after Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a peace accord in Algiers to halt their two-year-old border war. The Catholic church and the mosque were not spared, with clothing stolen from the first while a tank shell tore open the second, its imam showing a copy of Islam's holy book the Koran, partially devoured by flames. But stocks of alcohol and beer from hotels and cafes were especially favoured by the occupation troops, three of whom reportedly fell asleep and were left behind by their comrades during the withdrawal. An Eritrean officer said they had been arrested.

Just to the south in Alghadir, Ethiopian troops destroyed a cotton and a cement factory which were built in 1999 with anti-tank rockets. Some of that town's roughly 5,000 residents who had fled west to the Sudan trickled back on Wednesday, arriving in buses or on donkeys to find their homes, most of which were made from earth and branches, burned to the ground. A local official also said that 80 per cent of the materials needed for the growing season, which is due to begin in a few weeks, had also been destroyed. Tesseney had been taken twice by Ethiopian troops since they began an offensive on 12 May, but this time the troops also occupied houses which they systematically looted before leaving. In the streets on Wednesday, stray dogs scavenged scraps, wandering in and out of the abandoned homes.